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ABSTRACT

The seminar on assessment and accountability in education was believed to be the first national conference concerned with these coordinate issues. The participants generally concurred that accountability is a many faceted phenomenon with varying interpretations. It was further agreed that the major obstacle to setting up measures of accountability has been a lack of knowledge: school personnel have not known what to do or what to identify in demonstrating and describing the effectiveness of the educational enterprise. Before school personnel can be held completely accountable, there must be a sharper focus on the goals and objectives of teaching and learning. (Author/WM)

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assessment & accountability in education: threat or promise?

The report of a national seminar sponsored by
the Institute for Development of Educational Activities, Inc.,
the educational affiliate of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation

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definition of terms

Assessment

Assessment is defined as a plan for a systematic, census-like survey of knowledge, skills, understanding, and attitudes possessed by young Americans. It is an information-gathering program designed to provide information about some of the direct educational outcomes exhibited by students. The ultimate goal of assessment is to provide information that can be used to benefit the educational process through improved decision making.[1]

Accountability

Accountability is defined as "a process which serves to explain the results that are being achieved by public elementary and secondary schools. It provides a basis for developing an understanding of the relationship between the achievement of quality in education and the available resources in order to make educational improvements."[2]

[1] Frank B. Womer, *What Is National Assessment?* (Denver, Colorado: National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1970) p. 1.

[2] "Accountability: A Description as Viewed by the Cooperative Accountability Project," (Denver, Colorado: Cooperative Accountability Project, September 1972).

Test or Survey Instruments

A norm-referenced test is an instrument designed to provide information about how students, schools, districts, or any other decision-making body ranks in relation to each other. The standards of "goodness" and "badness" are internal to the test — high scores are good, low scores are bad. Norm-referenced testing is analogous to traditional letter grading of students.

A criterion-referenced test is an instrument designed to provide information about whether or not students or schools have attained an objective at a predetermined level of achievement regardless of how students relate to each other in their attainment. The standards of "goodness" and "badness" are external to the test — a human judgment of what is or is not acceptable performance. Criterion-referenced testing is analogous to pass-fail grading.[3]

An objective-referenced test is a criterion-referenced instrument in which local goals and objectives are the criteria. It provides an ideal solution to measuring student learning which is relevant to the local educational program.

[3] Frank B. Womer, *Developing a Large Scale Assessment Program.* (Denver, Colorado: Cooperative Accountability Project, 1973) pp. 34-35.

conference summary

"The accountability movement . . . is probably one of the fastest-moving phenomenons we have in American education." Leon Lessinger

"Laymen believe traditional testing programs report what students have learned when, as a matter of fact, they only identify the better students." Ralph Tyler

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"What concerns me in accountability is the 'account' part and not the 'ability'." James Hazlett

The seminar on Assessment and Accountability in Education, sponsored by the Charles F. Kettering Foundation's educational affiliate, Institute for Development of Educational Activities, Inc., was believed to be the first national conference concerned with these coordinate issues.

The participants generally concurred that accountability is a many faceted phenomenon with varying interpretations. It was further agreed that the major obstacle to setting up measures of accountability has been that school personnel have not known what to do or what to identify in terms of demonstrating and describing the effectiveness of the educational enterprise. Before school personnel can be held completely accountable, there must be a sharper focus on the goals and objectives of teaching and learning.

Certain broad agreements among the conference participants are summarized:

- Assessment and accountability are not synonymous. However, some type of assessment is a necessary component of accountability.
- Systems of accountability have been successfully implemented in some states.
- Because of the many variables inherent in the educational process, accountability per se cannot be used effectively as a tool for "weeding out" teachers.
- In any system of accountability, the outcomes to be achieved become the goals and objectives of the enterprise.
- Establishing an accountability system serves many purposes. Among them are determining emphasis and direction, developing consistency and unity of purpose, generating public support, and determining needed resources.
- A system of accountability can be functional only in those educational institutions which have definitely established goals and objectives, clearly defined and validated instructional programs and strategies, and carefully instituted specific procedures for measuring the programs' outcomes in terms of the stipulated objectives.
- Limitations in the current methods of measuring student achievement dictate against the use of any single criterion for evaluating teachers. Such a misapplication of achievement measurements is poor management practice and can lead to the early demise of educational accountability.
- In systems where accountability measures are functional, teachers enjoy an increased role in educational decision making.
- Although there are somewhat successful models of accountability in operation, any implementation of the concept must undergo some modification to fit local conditions.
- The implementation of an accountability system is likely to be successful if everyone associated with the educational process has received an adequate understanding of the concept, its implications, and its consequences.

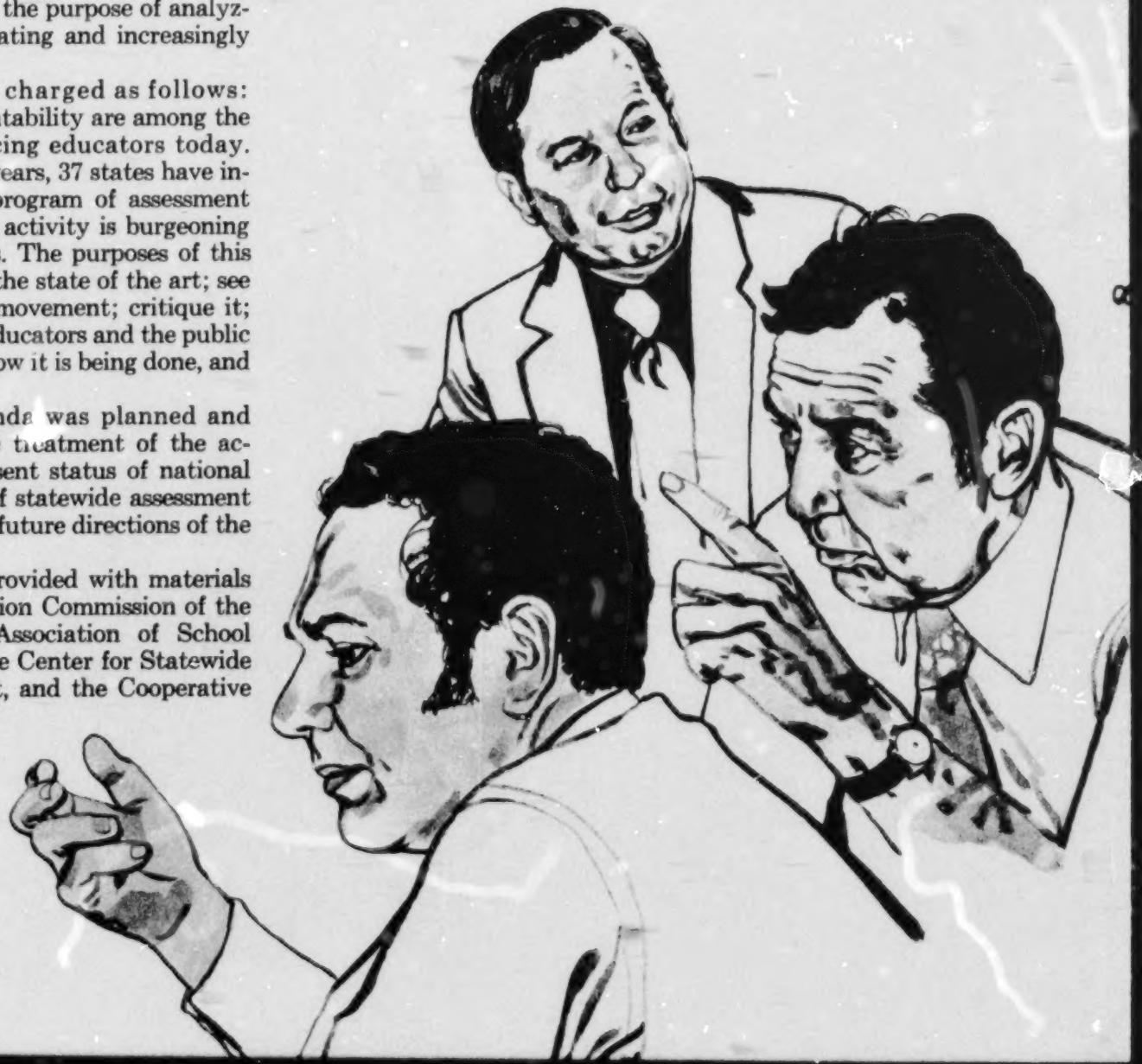
introduction

On March 28, 1974, 22 nationally prominent educators, knowledgeable about and involved in assessment and accountability, convened at a seminar in Atlanta for the purpose of analyzing this rapidly proliferating and increasingly controversial issue.

The conferees were charged as follows: "Assessment and accountability are among the most critical issues facing educators today. Within the last several years, 37 states have instituted some kind of program of assessment and accountability, and activity is burgeoning in the rest of the states. The purposes of this seminar are to examine the state of the art; see where we are with the movement; critique it; and report honestly to educators and the public on what is being done, how it is being done, and what should be done."

The conference agenda was planned and implemented to include treatment of the accomplishments and present status of national assessment, the status of statewide assessment and accountability, and future directions of the movement.

The conferees were provided with materials prepared by the Education Commission of the States, the National Association of School Boards of Education, the Center for Statewide Educational Assessment, and the Cooperative Accountability Project.



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assessment in historical perspective

George B. Brain, dean of the College of Education at Washington State University, placed assessment in its historical perspective when he wrote: "The assessment of performance is an age-old practice. The last verse of the first chapter of the Book of Genesis reads, 'And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was good.' That single act of the Creator apparently established the precedent for a practice of assessing all human behavior. Even though man lacks godlike omniscience, he tries to follow the precedent, and it was only logical that in time the concept of assessment came to be applied to the field of education.

"The process of assessing the educational attainments of students began almost four thousand years ago. The records of the Shun Dynasty of ancient China report an elaborate system of achievement examinations which provided the avenue of entry to the civil service. . . .

"Assessment played an important role in the early development of public education in this country. Horace Mann made provisions for a system of evaluation and reporting in his plan for education for the state of Massachusetts . . . When the U.S. Office of Education was established in 1867, one of the duties given to the U.S. Commissioner of Education was to determine the progress of education.

"Assessment began to become a science, or at least a developing technology, in the early years of this century. Now with the proliferation of wide-scale evaluation programs, with the perfection of electronic test processing equipment, and with public pressure for accountability in the educational enterprise, assessment continues to play a leading role in the process of education."[4]

national assessment in american education

The 1954 decision of the U.S. Supreme Court, in the historic case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, signaled the beginning of a revolution in American education. Congress began appropriating vast sums of money for compensatory education and a variety of other programs in efforts to equalize educational opportunities for all the nation's citizens. Since the U.S. Office of Education is responsible for designing, implementing, funding, and evaluating federally funded programs, in 1963, Francis Keppel (then U.S. Commissioner of Education) began talks with a number of educators on the feasibility and need for a nationwide study to describe for the American public the educational attainments of various groups. The idea of a national assessment program encountered considerable resistance because it was confused with a nationwide individual testing program. Many fears, including fear of a national curriculum, were expressed by those who were unsure about the processes and procedures which the assessment program would employ.

As a result of Keppel's concern, planning for national assessment began in 1964 with the establishment of the Exploratory Committee on Assessing the Progress of Education (ECAPE). ECAPE was established with Carnegie Corporation funds to investigate the possibilities of a national assessment and develop plans and instrumentation for its conduct. The work of ECAPE resulted in the design currently followed by National Assessment of Educational Progress. The actual administration of the exercises in the schools began in the spring of 1969. The program currently receives its major funding from the National Center for Educational Statistics in the U.S. Office of Education.

Seminar participant Ralph W. Tyler was chairman of ECAPE and because of his leadership is commonly referred to as the "father" of national assessment. In his initial remarks to other conferees, Tyler indicated a major purpose of the national assessment program is to provide the lay public with census-like data

[4] George B. Brain, "Some Values of Assessment," *Compact*, a publication of the Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colorado, Vol. 6, No. 1, February 1972, p. 5.

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on the educational achievements of children, youth, and adults — data which will furnish a dependable background of information about educational attainments, the progress being made, and the problems still to be faced in achieving the nation's educational aspirations. His remarks made it clear that national assessment was not established to provide accountability measures for particular schools or school systems.

The task of the Exploratory Committee on Assessing the Progress of Education began with an extensive examination of testing programs ordinarily used in the schools. This examination revealed that the commonly used testing programs do not furnish information about what students have learned. Rather, they indicate how far a student is above or below the average score of the group with which he is compared and how far the average score of a classroom or school is above or below the average of the group with which it is compared. The results, then, are useful for sorting or categorizing but are of little value for substantially improving educational programs, delivery systems, processes, or procedures.

Conventional achievement tests are constructed to measure individual differences and furnish reliable average scores for grade levels or schools. Test components are concentrated on those items which are typical of average performance. Exercises which all children can do and those which only a few can do are eliminated.

In reviewing standardized achievement tests for possible use in the national assessment, ECAPE found that more than 80 percent of the items in the most widely used achievement tests fell between the 40 and 60 percent levels of difficulty. Approximately 5 percent of the items were exercises which could be correctly answered by students in the lower third of a class, and another 5 percent represented tasks appropriate for the upper third. In order to assess the progress of education and inform teachers, administrators, and parents about student achievement, it is necessary to determine what all children have learned. Consequently, for the purpose of national assessment, it was necessary to develop exercises in which the test items equally represented the achievement characteristics of the lower, middle, and upper third of students at a particular age level.

Since one of the major purposes of the assessment project is to provide information that can be understood by laymen, the procedures used in the construction of assessment exercises involved lay citizens. In each of the fields of knowledge included in the program, scholars, teachers, and curriculum specialists formulated statements of objectives they believed reflected the contribution of their field toward the education of citizens at the prescribed age levels — objectives which schools are seeking to attain.

For each of the major objectives, prototype exercises were constructed which provided opportunities for students to demonstrate the behavior implied by the objective. The lists of objectives and exercises were reviewed by panels of citizens living in various sections of the United States. The judgment about each objective was made on the basis of two questions: (1) Is this something important for people to learn today? (2) Is it something I would like to have my children learn? This process resulted in some revisions and eliminations. However, the procedure was designed to ensure that every objective being assessed was considered important by scholars, accepted as an educational task by the school, and deemed desirable by lay citizens. The assessment instruments were field tested and revised until the final battery of exercises yielded sufficient information about the achievements of the total range of students.

The assessment project utilizes a variety of appraisal techniques since many important kinds of educational achievements are not validly indicated by student responses on paper-and-pencil tests. The purpose of the program is to assess the achievements of groups and subgroups of students; therefore, sampling methods are employed rather than testing every student within an age group. Under sampling procedures, a battery of tests divided into 14 parts requires no one student to take more than one-fourteenth of the total. Some of the testing methods employed are paper-and-pencil tests, verbal questions about interests and habits, performance tests designed to demonstrate skills, and participation in group projects involving citizenship practices.

The national assessment program is designed for periodic reassessment based on comparison of data from the initial assessment of an area. The Office of Management and Budget of the Executive Branch of the Federal Government has selected the national assessment program as the social indicator for what it considers basic elementary and secondary education.

statewide assessment in education

In December 1973, the Center for Statewide Educational Assessment, an affiliate of Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey, reported 60 assessment programs operated by the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

Most programs have formulated statewide goals and, in 31 states, those goals have been formally adopted. Forty-nine states assess by grade level but 12 of these also assess by age level. In those states that utilize grade level, grades four, six, and eight are most often assessed. However, state assessment programs based on age level most frequently assess ages nine, 13, and 17.

Practically all programs were initiated by state educational agencies — some prompted by state boards of education and others mandated by state legislatures.

All statewide programs are coordinated and administered by state educational agencies, often utilizing outside consultants or contractors. Fifty-eight of the 60 programs are mainly concerned with assessing cognitive areas such as language arts and mathematics. Forty-one programs include some noncognitive areas with attitude toward school, self-concept, and citizenship being assessed most frequently. A majority of the programs utilize standardized instruments although many programs also

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employ objective-referenced instruments. Ten programs employ standardized and objective-referenced instruments, while 25 programs utilize criterion-referenced instruments. More than 50 percent of the programs rely on outside data processing contractors who usually provide scoring services and data analysis.[5]

Interest in statewide assessment appears to have been generated by national assessment, needs assessments required for receipt of Title III federal funds, and the accountability movement. These three progenitors are all aimed toward educational improvement and decision making.

The national assessment program makes available to states:

1. statements of objectives for each of the ten subjects under assessment with procedures for achieving agreement among specialists, educators, and representatives of the lay public
2. methods and guidelines for developing criterion-referenced exercises to measure the objectives
3. a sampling design and administrative procedures for implementing it
4. a selection of actual criterion-referenced exercises used in earlier assessments
5. consultation services.

Consequently, 19 states are using some phase of the national assessment model, methods, or materials.

Approximately 24 of the state programs utilize government funds as a major source of revenue. This is an indication of stimulation to assess provided by Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and other federal programs.

The third progenitor, accountability, has popular appeal and derives from the ability to compare results. It is viewed as a means of narrowing the discrepancy between what schools profess to teach and what students actually learn.

The program emphasis in 17 states is on collecting information for decision making at the state level. In 14 states, it is on collecting information for decision making at the local level. In the 24 states and territories with emerging programs, program saliency had not been determined at the time of the ETS survey. Some states are accumulating data for state-level decision making and, at the same time, preparing reports for dissemination to local school districts, hoping the data will be useful for program improvement.

Assessment is mandated by state legislatures in 16 states. The basic reasons legislative bodies demand assessment programs are:

- The legislature is disenchanted with reports from the state educational agency, because the current achievement of schools is unknown or poorly defined.
- The legislators and citizens are seeking to improve the schools.
- Improved management of educational resources is necessary.

Assessment results are reported directly to the legislatures in the 16 states.

Several states report that program objectives are being met successfully, some report objectives are being met to some extent, and the majority report it is too early to determine the extent to which objectives are being met. Major problem areas identified within state assessment programs are:

- insufficient financial resources
- inadequate staffing
- insufficiently informed staff
- lag in development of systematic uses of data
- lack of acceptance by teachers who see the program as a threat which provides no direct benefits
- inadequate dissemination
- inability to assist school systems in the use of data
- misunderstanding of the program and its purposes at all levels.

Some programs reported no major problems. However, the difficulties expressed by many indicated that statewide assessment is in a state of flux. The majority of the states reported that one or more aspects of their programs would likely change in the near future with survey instruments, areas assessed, and use of program data being mentioned most frequently. Program goals, policies, and administration were cited least often as probable areas of change. Educational leaders at the state level recognize the problems and are seeking their resolution.[6]

[5] "State Educational Assessment Programs: 1973 Revision," *Center for Statewide Educational Assessment Newsletter*, Vol. 2, No. 2, December 1973.

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

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selected exemplary statewide assessment programs

Michigan

In Michigan, the state department of education initiated a state assessment act which was legislated in 1969. This act required the department of education to begin planning and developing a state program for the purpose of conducting a periodic and comprehensive assessment of educational progress. In 1970, additional legislation mandated a more comprehensive assessment program for the state. It required a statewide program of assessment of educational progress and remedial assistance in the basic skills of reading, mathematics, language arts, and/or other general subject areas.

According to seminar participant Philip Kearney, the staff had proposed to conduct a three-year pilot effort. However, with the enactment of the 1970 legislation, within six months norm-referenced tests were being utilized to assess in the areas of reading, mathematics, and language arts. The data collected created serious technical and political problems which resulted in norm-referenced instruments being discarded in favor of objective-referenced batteries.

This change in instrumentation necessitated the identification and utilization of scholars, teachers, and citizens in translating the common goals of Michigan education in the basic skills areas into minimal expectations or measurable objectives. These groups established the best estimates of minimum competencies students should achieve at specific points in the

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educational process. Once the objectives were determined, the state department contracted with four local school districts to develop the items and assessment exercises. A testing agency was employed to assist in the development of the battery.

The major purposes of assessment in Michigan are:

- to provide the state with information needed for allocating state funds and professional services in a manner best calculated to equalize educational opportunities so students can achieve competence in basic skills
- to provide school systems with strong incentives for introducing educational programs that will improve the education of students in basic skills and model programs and raise achievement levels
- to develop a system for educational self-renewal that would continuously evaluate the programs, thereby helping each school discover and introduce program changes designed to improve the quality of education.

The assessment program in Michigan, therefore, is designed to provide information for decision making at the state, district, and school levels. Data is presently being collected at the beginning of grades four and seven. When the program is fully implemented, data will be collected at five points along the educational continuum — at the beginning of grades one, four, seven, and ten, and during the spring of the 12th year. Full implementation is targeted for the 1976-77 school year.

The State of Michigan has also assumed leadership among the states in exploring and applying accountability procedures. As a reaction to the vigorous Michigan program, the Michigan Education Association and the National Education Association recently secured the services of three researchers to examine the quality and implications of that leadership. The specific purpose was to assess the educational soundness and utility for Michigan of the State Accountability System with particular emphasis on the assessment component. This effort culminated in the release of a highly critical report in March 1974.

The staff of the Michigan Department of Education responded to the study in a detailed reply. Of the nine recommendations made by the researchers, six received the full support of the staff and appropriate modifications were promised. There was profound disagreement with the other three recommendations and the staff expressed hope that future discussions will resolve the differences of opinion.

Florida

In Florida, the state department of education initiated statewide assessment legislation in 1970. A statute was passed requiring development of evaluation procedures designed to objectively assess educational programs offered by public schools of the state.

The Florida program utilizes criterion-referenced and norm-referenced instruments. As in Michigan, various school systems were selected for the development of performance objectives, test items, and assessment exercises. The plan was targeted for implementation in reading by the 1971-72 school year, in writing and mathematics by the 1972-73 school year, and in other subject areas by 1973-74. A random sampling method was utilized rather than testing every student.

The information collected through the assessment program is utilized for decision making at the state, district, and school levels as well as for educational accountability.

Seminar participant, James W. Guthrie, (who assisted in developing the program) believes Florida is the only state which has made an effort to link assessment, objectives, and accountability.

The Educational Accountability Act was passed by the Florida legislature in 1971. It provides for implementation and further development of assessment procedures designed to assure that programs lead to the attainment of established educational objectives, provide information for accurate cost analysis, and furnish data for analysis of the differential effectiveness of instructional programs.

The chief complaints about the Florida program come from school administrators who deplore the "mountains of paperwork" connected with the program.

California

In California, teachers and administrators consider that state's accountability regulations "a paper tiger." They indicate the goals range from the obvious to the banal, and many teachers treat them lightly. The only virtue mentioned is that it stimulates teachers to keep talking and thinking.

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educational accountability in historical perspective

The movement toward a concept of accountability seemed to gain impetus in the summer of 1968 when a Committee for Economic Development report issued an indictment against the public schools. The report indicated that many schools and school districts, handicapped by outmoded organization and lack of research and development money, were not providing the kind of education that produced rational, responsible, and effective citizens. This serious indictment strongly suggested a major redevelopment of management of the educational system.

References to educational accountability began to appear in the professional literature in 1969; however, the real focus of attention on it as a concept occurred in 1970. This concept seems to have grown out of the passage of the far-reaching Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 which gave the public schools a new mandate. The caveat was not only for equality of educational opportunity, but also for equitable results. Under this new prescription, schools were expected to give every student basic competency — regardless of ability, interest, background, home, or family income.

When Leon Lessinger, the "father" of the accountability movement (then an Associate Commissioner in the U.S. Office of Education) began to use the term accountability in 1968, he was proposing a method of ensuring three basic rights in education:

1. the student's right to be taught what he needs to know in order to be a productive and satisfied member of society
2. the taxpayer's right to be informed of the educational results produced by specific expenditures
3. the school's right to draw on all resources of society instead of being restricted to the overburdened resources of educators.

The method Lessinger championed for achieving the goal of guaranteed acquisition of basic skills was an independent audit of educational results. This he referred to as the process of "educational engineering." At that

point, discussions of accountability in educational circles shifted to consideration of performance contracting, external audits, program planning, budgeting systems, and voucher plans. Therefore, accountability — which was to be achieved by those methods — became secondary. The primary focus was on the methods themselves rather than on educational outcomes. As a result, the concept of accountability has been interpreted in many different and confusing ways.

However, a number of misconceptions are gradually being eliminated and some degree of consensus seems to be emerging. Perhaps a contributor to this is the realization by educators that accountability implies a specific kind of responsibility — a responsibility to someone for something. The fact that there are consequences brings in the aspect of being accountable.

Although the present movement is but a few years old, the only thing that is relatively new about the concept of accountability is its application to the outcomes of the educational process. School officials have always been accountable to taxpayers for the proper receipt and disbursement of funds, to parents for the safety and custodial care of students, to college officials for the quality of college preparatory programs, and to accreditation and professional associations for a variety of input standards. The negative consequences include discharge from a position, criminal indictment, and loss of accreditation. The benefits include continued support, increased trust by clients and patrons, and credibility.

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current status of educational accountability

During the Atlanta seminar, Lessinger asserted that, when he attempted to do a bibliography on accountability in education some years ago, he found very few references. Today, there are more than 4,000 books and articles relative to the subject; but they only add to the confusion by offering a wide variety of definitions. The conferees, however, seemed to agree there is a widely accepted core of meaning ascribed to the concept. The basic idea it conveys is that school systems, schools, and the educators who operate them, should be held responsible for educational outcomes — for what children learn. The concept not only includes responsibility for performance in achieving goals and objectives, but also for selecting appropriate or relevant goals.

In spite of the attendant controversy, accountability appears to be alive and well in American education. By the fall of 1972, accountability legislation had been introduced in 29 states, enacted in 23, and at least 10 other states followed in 1973. So with the conditions that led to the birth of the concept continuing to proliferate, the prospects for an even more precocious growth seem inevitable.

The conference participants agreed that accountability and assessment are not synonymous even though some form of assessment is a necessary aspect of accountability. They also agreed that accountability is not limited to school boards, administrators, teachers, students, or any other specific group. Nor is accountability to be confused with methods presumed to be useful in carrying it out such as performance contracting, system analysis, program planning, budgeting systems, or management by objectives.

The movement has, however, forced an added responsibility on the schools — a responsibility for stipulated outcomes, a quality assurance process, a type of external review to ascertain success or failure, and a system for publicly reporting the actual outcomes in relation to expenditures.

types of accountability

The conferees agreed that the total concept of educational accountability is three-dimensional. Perhaps, the delineation which follows will answer the often asked questions, Who is accountable to whom? and What are they accountable for?

- *System accountability* is a broad concept applied to school districts. It involves the degree to which they provide promised resources. School systems, then, are accountable to the public for developing appropriate goals and objectives in relation to state goals and needs and expectations of local communities; for ensuring the schools are staffed by competent personnel; for continually assessing the achievement of students; and for disseminating the results and analyses to school personnel, parents, and citizens through an independent and objective method.
- *Professional accountability* refers to school administrators and teachers at the building level. It involves knowledge and use of those attitudes, skills, and techniques revealed through research or analysis of the state of the art to be reliable in producing desired outcomes. Specifically, building administrators are accountable for development and selection of appropriate instructional programs for achieving stated objectives. Teachers are specifically accountable for utilizing instructional approaches that will produce program outcomes consistent with preselected objectives at an appropriate level of performance for the instructional program.
- *Performance accountability* is concerned with the effectiveness of programs and methods in achieving

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desired outcomes. These programs and methods must meet the stated objectives or they are redesigned and implemented until they do.

The term educational accountability has frequently been equated with the type of engineering process used in industrial production. The analogy is only useful to a point. Beyond that, it becomes misleading to the extent that efforts to develop objective criteria of professional accountability can be undermined. Granted, there is a certain amount of quality control (or internal evaluation) and some quality assurance involved in both processes. Both involve compliance with standards or laws and elements of efficiency and effectiveness. But, in industrial production, once a quality item is manufactured, repeating the exact process will continue to produce items of like quality. Such is not the case in education.

It must be kept in mind that education is a social process in which human beings are continually interacting in ways that can neither be measured nor predicted. "... Education does not deal with inert raw materials, but with living minds that are instinctively concerned first with preserving their own integrity and second with reaching a meaningful accommodation with the world around them...."[7]

[7] Henry S. Dyer, "Toward Objective Criteria of Professional Accountability in the Schools of New York City," *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 52, No. 4, p. 211, December 1970.

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how teachers view the concept of assessment and accountability

Accountability is a buzz word of increasing velocity in teachers' lounges and workrooms of the nation's schools. Many teachers view the concept as a merit system, or a weeding system, aimed directly at them. Consequently, teachers feel the quest for accountability will become a major distraction from the real business of teaching and learning.

Justification for these negative views of assessment and accountability is seen in the 1970-71 Iowa case in which a school district refused to renew the contract of a teacher who had been teaching there since 1960. The reason specified was that her students' scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the Iowa Test of Educational Development were too low. The Supreme Court declined to review the decision and left standing a Court of Appeals decision that evaluating a teacher on the basis of her students' test scores is a reasonable exercise of school board authority. The Supreme Court's decision in this case could have considerable influence on future attitudes of teachers toward educational assessment and accountability.

The following items represent some of the concerns expressed by teachers and their organizations:

- Paperwork and record-keeping requirements of accountability will result in busywork and decrease available instructional time.
- Performance contracting so far has been a failure and has damaged the reputation of accountability.
- A public climate in which sound education is all but impossible will place more of society's failures at the educator's doorstep — failures with which educators will be unable to cope.
- Many important goals of education cannot be assessed until students have graduated.
- By emphasizing objective measurement, attention will only be focused on those learning skills which can be easily measured.
- Emphasis on measurable performance will tend to stifle and retard innovative teaching efforts which are necessary to keep pace with the rapidly changing needs of society.
- The attempt to hold different educational levels accountable will create conflict where harmony is essential.

In February 1973, the board of directors of the National Education Association unanimously approved a declaration on educational accountability and authorized four immediate steps to fight oversimplified approaches to accountability. The steps are:

1. a state-by-state analysis of "hard data" to identify where the dangers now exist
2. coordination among NEA state and local affiliates to develop an action plan at all levels with positive implications that will place teachers in the leadership role
3. investigation of possibilities for initiating legal action challenging misguided accountability rules
4. modification of national and state legislation leading to positive programs of accountability for quality education.

NEA President Catherine Barrett praised the board action as ". . . most significant in terms of the real concerns of our membership." She further noted "Compulsion about accountability in education has reached crisis proportions in at least 30 states and is spreading fast to all 50.

"Teachers nationwide will respond happily to accountability when they become autonomous enough to have part in shaping standards for certification and determining curriculum. We will be accountable when our knowledge about the needs of youngsters in school becomes a part of planning the total educational structure. Until then, governmental bodies and administrators will have to bear the responsibility. Students and teachers will no longer be victimized by a simplistic approach to a concept that has caught the public fancy."[8]

[8] *NEA Reporter*, Vol. 12, No. 2, March 1973, p. 1.

how the conferees view the concept of assessment and accountability

The conferees agreed that a very positive outgrowth of the concept is the necessity to define education — its direction, approaches, and outcomes. They conceded it could potentially change managerial opinions regarding how organizations operate. The group also asserted that, in Florida and other states where various strategies of accountability are being successfully implemented, a very positive type managerial system was in operation prior to consideration of any tools or strategies of accountability. In instances where accountability is being used as an anti-collective bargaining or anti-tenure device, it is understandable that the concept is viewed with suspicion. This notion was expressed by Congressman John Brademas when he described accountability as a way of pointing a punishing finger at someone, particularly at teachers.

The conferees surmised that the organized teaching profession would respond positively to the concept if it made the classroom teacher's responsibility more explicit, rather than emphasized their failures.

As a result of the conference deliberations, the conferees concluded:

- Because of the many variables that affect the outcomes of students' educational experiences, the problems of separating the effects of different teachers and administrators, influence of parents, and out-of-school experiences negate holding individual teachers totally accountable for student failures.
- Teachers' concerns grow out of their definitions of accountability which partly result from the manner in which they hold students accountable.
- Accountability can potentially force closer relationships among all levels of the educational enterprise as they focus on common goals of student learning.
- Accountability can promote the importance of parents and communities as an integral part of the total educational effort inasmuch as selection of learner objectives and establishment of priorities are emphasized.
- Accountability can stimulate the search for more efficient and effective ways of producing learning and an objective reexamination of educational practices and procedures.
- Accountability can conceivably improve communication between schools and communities as a result of school boards and educators corroborating to clarify process and performance objectives and relate efforts in terms of results.
- Accountability can promote early diagnoses of learning deficiencies in the classroom and provide a basis for individualizing instruction.
- Teacher in-service programs designed to provide skills directly related to learner needs can evolve from accountability.

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- Instructional materials can be selected on the basis of relationship to identified learner needs.
- As a result of accountability, teacher-training institutions should shift emphasis from the accumulation of required credits to the acquisition of required skills.
- In any system of accountability, each participant in the educational process should be held accountable only for those educational outcomes that can be affected by his own actions or decisions.
- The extent to which an individual educator is expected to effect outcomes should be empirically determined by analyzing results obtained from all personnel working in comparable circumstances.
- Enlightened management teams and humanistic managerial principles are requisites for successful implementation of any system of accountability.
- Accountability should facilitate the establishment of objective and equitable systems for evaluating teachers.
- A clear statement of goals and objectives is critical for teacher evaluation. Information obtained through evaluation should only be used to supply feedback for the purpose of enhancing professional growth.

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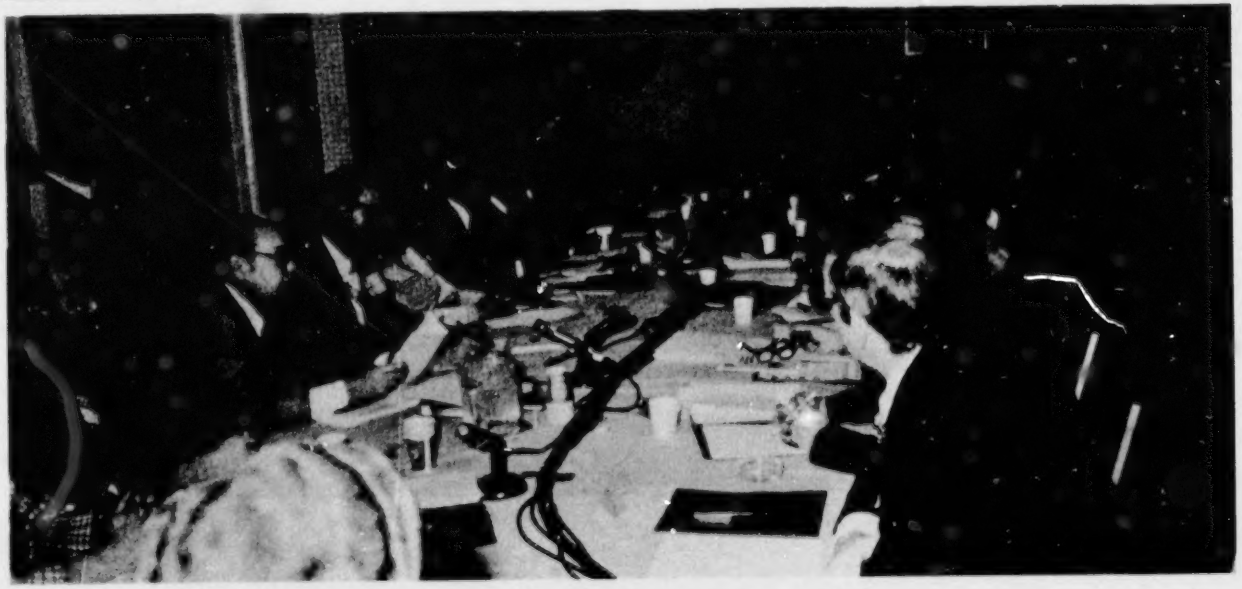
what needs to be done

All conferees agreed that accountability is a viable concept that holds enormous potential for American education. However, they realized that much has to be done if the concept is to become functional on a nation-wide scale.

Some of the approaches which need to be undertaken are:

- The U.S. Office of Education along with various foundations should initiate a massive research and dissemination effort on exemplary accountability models.
- A corps of people knowledgeable about the concept should be identified in each state and commissioned to be communicators in the dissemination efforts.
- Efforts must be intensified to appeal to the organized teaching profession rather than individual teachers. The logical and positive consequences of accountability must be defined.
- In addition to publications, efforts toward dissemination should include personal contact either on the basis of requests by school districts or preplanned area conferences.
- The National Institute of Education and foundations with educational affiliates should encourage test and measurement developers to sponsor programs for the purpose of helping the public and the profession correctly interpret data produced by various measurement devices.



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